

# THE 1897 STORY - I

*By Jerome Clark & Lucius Farish*

THE FILE on the great UFO flap of 1897—if and when it is published *in toto*—will be both immense and revealing. It will spotlight a major but almost completely unrecognised area of human experience: the relationship between unexplained phenomena and mankind; and, properly understood, it will enable us to interpret the vast mysteries suggested by the appearance of unknown aerial vessels in our own time. It will show us how limitations in human consciousness prevent acknowledgment of the real nature of extramundane occurrences; even more important, it will demonstrate how these limitations affect *the occurrences themselves*.

Most students of the Unknown, unfortunately, have yet to grasp this last point. If they did, they would find that the forces responsible for all those manifestations of what Allen Greenfield likes to call “alternate reality” (whatever *that* means) possess remarkable insight into human perception, to the degree that these forces (however they choose to pose) can appear or disappear, or communicate nonsense or remain silent, or merely imply what they know will be inferred. They cannot mask all of their activities, but they can make certain that what we experience is not what actually happened. On another level (and they work on many levels, partially because they are in conflict) they can deliberately show themselves in attempts to establish limited contacts for specific objectives, only adapting guises to prevent those they approach from going insane or dying from sheer fright.

These considerations must enter strongly into any theorising whose point of departure is 1897. Evidently, contact of one kind was being sought, and contact of another kind was being avoided. Contact whose intention was to reinforce the carefully nurtured terrestrial origin idea was not at all uncommon. Such incidents, in fact, numbered in the thousands.

## A case of deception ?

In the contacts we have uncovered to date, however, we have not found anything about the purpose of the whole affair. *Is there anything at all important contained in these contacts—anything we can infer beyond the observation that the ufonauts used deception? How much deception? Are the “messages” imparted by the airships’ occupants of no significance, or are there truths in them, hidden somewhere amidst the lies, that are not readily apparent? In other words, were the incidents of 1897 an attempt by the ufonauts to establish a kind of communication with us—or were they a means, instead, to keep us as far as possible from an awareness of what they were and what they were doing?*

Obviously, if the ufonauts were attempting to impart something to us, it was not that superhuman agencies were operating on Earth—something quite the contrary. But by flying over cities, following trains, landing, and

in other ways revealing themselves to tens of thousands of Americans, the airships insured, whether intentionally or not, that they would be sighted by great numbers of witnesses.

*Something* was going on between human beings and ufonauts, or the latter would never have gone to the trouble of assuming the “terrestrial” rôle. What this “something” was, what the place of the 1897 events in the history of humanity’s dealings with entities from elsewhere is, what the ufonauts have tried to tell us or not to tell us—these are matters that publication of the whole 1897 story may clear up.

## The Midwestern “airship” story unfolds

Newspapers in the Midwestern United States first became aware of strange objects in the air when reporters began wiring in accounts of a glowing fireball. The Hudson, Michigan, *Post*, in a dispatch out of Jefferson, related that on March 26: “A beautiful ball of fire was seen in the clouds of this place. For a short time it was very bright, and then it appeared to go down. It lasted for some time.” And, according to the Grand Traverse *Herald* for April 1: “A beautiful ball of fire was seen in the clouds near Holland the other night. One moment it was brilliant, the next dimmed, as if covered by a veil. It lasted about an hour.”

Then events began to crystallise with an account from Galesburg, Michigan. On the night of March 31, at about 10 o’clock, a brilliant white object, accompanied by “a sharp crackling sound”, soared over the city and was visible for 30 seconds or so. One of the witnesses maintained that the phenomenon was a huge black object tipped with flame and flying far above the earth. A Mrs. Wyngate, in nearby Charleston township, swore that she heard human voices from above at the time of the sighting.

As excitement about the airship swept through mid-America, some curious persons stayed out nights to watch for signs of the construction, and one man claimed to have had a terrifying experience as the occupants of the craft tried either to kidnap him or just to play some weird practical joke. One night Robert Hibbard, tramping about his Iowa farm hoping to see the airship, caught sight of a dark object, lighted on each side by what appeared to be incandescent lamps, as it flew in from the south at a mile altitude. When it came directly over his head, the machine changed direction and descended until a grapnel attached to the end of a drag rope hooked his trousers. Then the ship rose again and headed back in the direction it had come. Terrified, Hibbard was dragged some distance, saving himself only when he grabbed on to a small sapling with both hands. The hook tore through his pants, and the airship continued on its way.

Iowa had a large number of sightings throughout late

March and early April. One of them, one of several during the period involving railroads, was made by station agents and operators all along the Burlington, Cedar Rapids & Northern Railway on April 8. First seen at Cedar Rapids at 9 p.m., an airship moved slowly down the line until it faded from view an hour later. A newspaper account describes it as "having a bright, glaring headlight revealing a glistening steel hull, dim wing-like projections on each side, and producing a hissing sound as it glides through the air."

Another railroad story came from engineer F. L. Bullard, on engine 950 of the fast mail, whose train a large airship raced out of Chicago. The airship, by Bullard's estimate, travelled 150 miles an hour as it rapidly outdistanced the locomotive.

#### Message from "Pegasus"

Residents of Appleton, Wisconsin, saw the mysterious object pass over their city on the night of the 11th, and a few days later, N. B. Clark, a farmer living north of the town, found an 18in. iron rod sticking in the ground. Attached to it, he told a local newspaper, was an unsigned letter:

Aboard the Airship "Pegasus", April 9, 1897—The problem of aerial navigation has been solved. The writers have spent the past month cruising about in the airship "Pegasus" and have demonstrated to their entire satisfaction that the ship is a thorough success. We have been able to attain a speed of 150 miles an hour and have risen to a height of 2,500 feet above sea level.

The "Pegasus" was erected at a secluded point ten miles from Layfayette, Tenn., and the various parts of the machine were carried overland from Glasgow, Ky., to that point, being shipped from Chicago, Pittsburg and St. Louis. We have made regular trips of three days each from Layfayette to Yaukon, and no harm has come to the "Pegasus" thus far.

Within a month our application for the patents for a parallel plane air ship will be filed simultaneously at Washington and the European capitals. The ship is propelled by steam and is lighted by electricity and has a carrying power of 1,000 pounds.

Hundreds of Holland, Michigan, residents watched an airship floating over Black Lake at 8.35 on the night

of the 11th. "It was a large dark mass," stated the Grand Rapids *Evening Press* the next day, "apparently lighted with coloured electric lights." After hovering for several minutes, it travelled north-west "in a zig-zag style" and soon disappeared from sight.

In the midst of all this, odd tales of an unknown four-legged creature began to circulate. The Niles, Michigan, *Weekly Mirror* for April 14 reported, "That terrible animal that made its appearance near Pine Lake and Edwardsburg last year came again the latter part of the week. The men spearing on Pine Lake made for the shore rapidly and three guns were fired in the direction of the terrible noise." Whatever this "terrible noise" was, the creature escaped. The Saginaw *Evening News* a few days later noted that the animal had slaughtered sheep and cattle, and resembled a panther.\*

At about the same time various people in the Niles area saw a huge lighted object (on the night of the 11th), and an airship put in an appearance at Pine Lake just several days later, according, at least, to the nearly incredible testimony of William Megiveron.

Megiveron told the Lansing *State Republican* that on the night of the 15th he was awakened by a tap on his window, and when he opened his eyes, an intense glare of light nearly blinded him. Stepping outside, he heard a voice from above him. The voice explained that the light emanated from the airship, which had lain concealed behind a bank of clouds since afternoon, when a stray shot from a duckhunter's gun had injured one of the wings. The occupants had been working on repairs since then, the voice said. It then asked for four dozen egg sandwiches and a kettle of coffee for the crew. After Megiveron had complied, a large scoop containing Canadian quarters in payment was lowered from the clouds and pulled back up when the supplies had been loaded on.

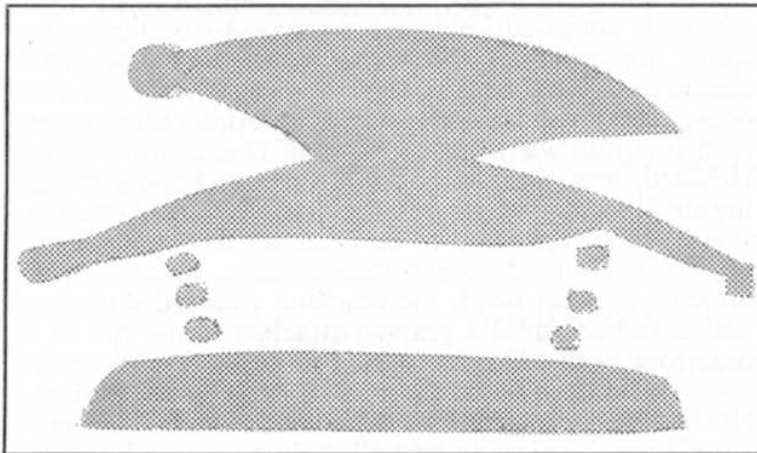
The witness thought the craft hovered at an altitude of 300ft., and that it might be as much as half a mile long. All he could see, however, were the outlines of the machine, due to the brilliant searchlight "which made everything below as bright as day and above as dark as midnight during a cyclone."

Megiveron asked several times to be taken aboard, but hoots of laughter greeted each request. He suspected that the crew might have been drinking, since they had asked for a corkscrew.

Whatever the case, just as dawn started to break, the airship took off, heading toward the city.

At least twenty persons observed an airship hovering above the Battle Creek, Michigan, sanatorium on the night of the 12th. According to them, the craft was all ablaze with lights. Describing the phenomenon, a Mr. Dixon said, "The upper part was in the form of a cone, from which was suspended a large object, cylindrical in form. At the rear end of the lower object was some kind of wheel, which made a buzzing sound that was distinctly heard."

Suddenly there was an explosion. Sparks flew, and the ship began to descend from an altitude of a mile down to a half-mile. Another explosion sounded, sparks flew from the wheel, and the craft began to rise again. Its two lights—a red one in front, a light blue one behind—went out, and it no longer could be seen.



This sketch of an unknown airship that passed over Holland, Michigan, appeared in the Benton Harbor *Evening News* of April 19, 1897.



### Explosion over Kalamazoo

At Kalamazoo, George W. Somers and William Chadburn saw a lighted object passing over them at a great speed. Within moments they heard a dull explosion, followed by a sound as of projectiles flying through the air. Several other people told the newspapers that they, too, had heard an explosion, but had passed it off as thunder.

"But the discoveries of the morning are sufficient to establish the veracity of the two actual observers," noted the Bay City *Times-Press*. "In one place, two miles from Scotts, there was found a large coil of heavy wire, evidently a part of some electrical appliance. At another point a propeller blade of some very light material was discovered in a partially fused condition. Three men engaged in shingling a barn in Comstock township affirm that, upon resuming work on the morning following the occurrence, they found their completed work covered with minute fragments which had in some instances penetrated the shingles and entered the boards beneath."

In a related incident, the next evening an airship crossed over lower Michigan; among the witnesses were Mr. and Mrs. George Parks of Pennfield, who saw a very bright "humming" object flying about 100ft. above their farm. When a portion of it broke off and buried itself into the ground, Parks' wife, badly frightened, would not let her husband approach it.

The next morning Parks and his brother Benjamin dug it up and found a large aluminium wheel, three feet in diameter and in the shape of a turbine. "This is the first time," Parks commented, "that I ever heard of a meteor having wheels." Not particularly impressed, the *Saginaw Courier-Herald* asked, "Will someone tell how an aluminium wheel, made presumably as light as possible consistent with required strength, would fall and bury itself so far in the ground that it would have to be dug up?"

A number of reports on the 12th, in any case, suggest that a crippled airship may have been in operation. At 2.30 p.m. a craft landed at the farm of Z. Thacker near Nilwood, Illinois, and was seen by three men. At 6, a large crowd of miners watched it alight in a grove north of the Green Ridge mining camp. The craft fled as the observers began walking toward it. Sightings were later made at Sherman (8 p.m.) and Williamsville (8.45). "Those who saw it," stated a newspaper account, "say it had a boat which was cigar-shaped, with ears or wings extending from the side, and a canopy on the top similar to a picnic stand." Near Green Ridge a mine operator while hunting saw a man working on the airship's machinery. "The fact of its alighting twice and remaining such a long time in the same locality," the newspaper writer suggested, "leads to the conclusion that the machinery was injured in some manner."

On the 13th, lumberman James G. Macpherson, eating supper in the dining car of a train stopped at Spooner, Wisconsin, had his attention drawn to a strange ruddy glow in the sky. Macpherson estimated it to be ten miles away at first, but in 15 minutes it had flown within half a mile of the train. The witness could not see any definite shape with his naked eye but was certain that he would have been able to with the aid

of binoculars. The light "dipped" and then flew away, and was quickly lost to sight.

Professor John Friske of Harvard, a writer on scientific subjects, was another witness to the sighting. Friske told a reporter that anyone who had doubts about the airship's existence should direct his questions to him.

Warned that the airship was approaching, over 150 persons gathered at the depot in Eau Claire, Wisconsin, the same night. The story had been telegraphed from Merrillan by an operator who had seen the craft himself. Shortly afterwards, some of the spectators, among them the Eau Claire depot agent, viewed the high-flying construction through field glasses.

About the same time that night, several individuals in Waukegan, Illinois, watched a red light moving on an erratic course for the north. It was visible for about an hour. Earlier, an object with blue, red and green lights sailed over Benton Harbor and St. Joseph in Michigan. William Peckmann sighted a similar phenomenon over Adrian.

### Creature Report

According to several Michigan newspapers, a curious incident occurred at about 4.30 on the afternoon of the 14th, when a balloon-like object, after hovering for an hour near Reynolds, descended and alighted on the ground. A group of farmers cautiously approached and were able to observe a "strange man," 9½ft. in height, sitting inside the craft. Next to him lay stacks of heavy clothes "which looked like the pelts of polar bears," yet he was almost naked, as if suffering from the heat.

#### ADVERTISEMENT

## BUFORA NEWS

### Northern Conference in Manchester

The Direct Investigation Group On Aerial Phenomena will be acting as hosts. The conference will be held on Saturday, 12th October 1968 in the Friends Meeting House, Manchester. For tickets and details, send a S.A.E. to Mrs. J. Nelstrop, Hon. Sec., DIGAP, 5, Ridgmont Road, Bramhall, Cheshire.

### Local Societies

BUFORA now has over 21 affiliated societies and groups. Most of these hold meetings locally and several issue their own publications. A list of organisations is published in BUFORA JOURNAL.

For details of the BRITISH UNIDENTIFIED FLYING OBJECT RESEARCH ASSOCIATION, its London lectures and BUFORA JOURNAL, send a 9in. x 4in. S.A.E. to Miss C. Henning (FSR), 99, Mayday Gardens, London S.E.3.

His speech sounded like bellowing. One farmer walked over to the being, apparently in an attempt to communicate, but the creature, none too hospitable evidently, kicked him savagely and broke his hip.

Reported the *Saginaw Courier-Herald* in a dispatch out of Reynolds, "Great excitement prevails here, and lots of people are flocking here from Morley and Howard City to view the strange being at a distance, as no one dares to go near. He seems to be trying to talk to the people. The people here are incredulous, and those who have not seen refuse to believe the report, although six of the best people in that locality are here and affirm that it is the truth. From their excited manners we are led to believe that no hoax exists. His balloon seems to be out of repair. At 8.10 last evening the airship passed south and a little west of Howard City. Hundreds of people watched its flight."

Other reports of airships were made at Constantine and Battle Creek, Michigan, and Hillsboro, Illinois, that night. In each case witnesses told of sighting red lights on the craft.

#### NOTE

\* See Charles Bowen's *Mystery Animals*, FLYING SAUCER REVIEW, November/December 1964.

#### FURTHER READING

- Jerome Clark, *A Contact Claim*, FSR, January/February 1965.  
*The Strange Case of the 1897 Airship*, FSR, July/August 1966.  
*More on 1897*, FSR, July/August 1967.  
Gordon W. Creighton, *Saucers and South Africa*, FSR, September/October 1962.  
Lucius Farish, *An 1880 UFO*, FSR, May/June 1965.  
Donald B. Hanlon, *Texas Odyssey of 1897*, FSR, September/October 1966.  
— and Jacques Vallée, *Airships over Texas*, FSR, January/February 1967.  
W. H. Watson, *19th Century Paraglider?* FSR, November/December 1967.

## TWENTY YEARS BACK

By Brinsley le Poer Trench

DURING the course of the hearing on UFOs before the House Armed Services Committee of Congress on April 5, 1966, Major Hector Quintanilla, Jr., head of the U.S. Air Force project Bluebook, was asked by Congressman Richard S. Schweiker of Pennsylvania if it was true that none of the UFOs had been tracked on radar.

The major replied: "We have no radar cases which are unexplained."<sup>1</sup>

This, of course, was an ambiguous and unsatisfactory reply. Whether the major intended to imply that no UFOs had ever been tracked on radar or whether radar sightings had all been rationally explained during his own tenureship of office is not clear. However, his answer could not have done our cause any good in front of the powerful committee.

Certainly, any implication that UFOs have not been tracked on radar must be refuted and nailed down once and for all.

In 1948, especially during the last quarter, there were many instances of UFOs being picked up on radar. I think it useful to close my 1948 casebook with a look at some of these.

On December 27, 1949, Project Saucer was finally closed down and soon afterwards succeeded by Project Sign. (Both these projects were prior to the formation of Bluebook in 1951). Aimé Michel in his excellent book<sup>2</sup> gives credit to Major Donald E. Keyhoe for digging out the following cases from the final report of Project Saucer. These cases are given here verbatim from that report.

Case 188. Goose Bay, Labrador, October 29, 1948: A non-astronomical phenomenon traced by radar. The experts should investigate the evidence.

Case 189. Goose Bay again, October 31, 1948: An identical phenomenon, followed by radar.

Case 196. Object travelling against the wind. Observed by radar.

Case 198. A spot on the radar screen moving rapidly and changing direction continuously.

It is interesting to note, too, what one of Major Quintanilla's predecessors at Project Bluebook has to tell us about radar sightings in 1948. The late Edward J. Ruppelt described in his book<sup>3</sup> how on October 15, 1948, an F-61, a World War II "Black Widow" night fighter, was flying over Japan when it got a UFO on its radar. The object was at an altitude of about 5,000-6,000ft., and moving about at 200 mph. The fighter tried to get close but the UFO accelerated to around 1,200 mph, far outstripping its pursuer. Ruppelt wrote that the aircrew made six attempts to close in on the UFO. However, on one attempt they did get close enough to observe that the UFO was about 20 to 30ft. long and shaped "like a rifle bullet".

Ruppelt went on to relate how a wire was received from Germany on November 23, giving details of what he emphasised was the first report where a UFO was seen from the air and simultaneously tracked on radar. This concerned an air force pilot who spotted what looked like a reddish star moving in a southerly direction across Munich. The pilot called base operations and they contacted the radar station. At first radar reported seeing nothing, but after checking again called back to state they did have a target at 27,000ft, some 30 miles south of Munich, travelling at 900 mph. The pilot reported that the object he saw was now in that area. A few minutes later radar called again to say that the UFO had climbed to 50,000ft. and was circling 40 miles south of Munich.

Ruppelt added that the Air Weather Service stated the object was not a balloon. No other aircraft was in the area.

The cases that I have outlined indicate quite clearly that as long ago as 1948 UFOs were being tracked on radar over such widely scattered areas as Germany, Japan and the United States.

Since then there have been a great many radar trackings of UFOs. The late Frank Edwards in his last book<sup>1</sup> states that the Civil Aeronautics Administration

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# UFOs AND COMMERCIAL AIR TRAFFIC

Probable allocation of liability after a UFO-caused crash

By DAVID BROBECK Jr.

## Part I — A Hypothetical case

Our contributor, who lives in San Diego, California, is a student at law school

JOHN DOE boarded defendant American Airline's 727 jet, Flight 211, at approximately 1.45 p.m. on March 21, 1969, for a flight from San Diego, California, to Las Vegas, Nevada. At 12.15 p.m. on that same day, defendant Airline's chief flight dispatcher at their San Diego facility monitored a series of radio transmissions between a Federal Aviation Agency Air Traffic Control official in Los Angeles and the pilot of American Airlines Flight 186, then en route from Las Vegas, Nevada, to San Diego, California. The pilot of this flight reported encountering two unidentified flying objects, commonly termed "UFOs", over an area of the Mojave Desert near the town of Ludlow.

Flying in formation, the objects approached the plane head-on at high speed from the north-east; the pilot reported that he was forced to take immediate evasive action, and the plane made a rapid descent of approximately 3,000ft. Several passengers were injured, though none seriously, and ambulances were requested and utilised when the flight arrived in San Diego. The unusual objects were also reported to ATC by two other commercial flights that crossed the same area minutes after Flight 186; in each case, the unknowns had made rapid head-on approaches, veering away at the last possible moment.

American Airlines, in view of the continued encounters with the UFOs over that area of the Mojave Desert, and the scheduled departure of Flight 211, contacted the Federal Aviation Agency (FAA) headquarters in Los Angeles and Las Vegas. Officials at these offices had previously consulted by telephone with members of the staff of Project Blue Book, the official U.S. Air Force UFO investigation with headquarters at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, Dayton, Ohio. Subsequent to these communications, defendant American Airlines was notified by the FAA facility in Los Angeles that the unidentified objects represented no threat to any aircraft which might pass over the area in question.

At approximately 2.05 p.m., the pilot of Flight 211 contacted the Air Traffic Control (ATC) facility in Las Vegas and reported the visual sighting of a pair of unknown craft, apparently metallic, closing fast from the north-west at the approximate distances of four miles and elevation of 30,000ft.—the same altitude at which Flight 211 was then proceeding. Las Vegas ATC advised that although there were no other known aircraft in the area, their radar showed two slow-moving blips approaching the plane from the north at a distance of approximately five miles. The pilot then reported that one of the objects had turned to the north-east, but that the other appeared to be rapidly accelerat-

ing toward the plane. Radio communication was suddenly broken off, and when the flight became overdue at the Las Vegas terminal, a ground-air search was instituted. Thirty minutes later the wreckage was spotted from the air, and the initial rescue teams on the scene reported no signs of life in the scattered wreckage.

In the official Civil Aeronautics Board Report on the crash, the cause was not specifically attributed to the UFO, although the flight recorder indicated a collision was imminent. Investigators reported that there was clear evidence of a mid-air collision due to the wide separation of the two concentrations of wreckage; a mid-air explosion was ruled not to have been the cause for such a divergence, since the rear-fuselage and tail section had apparently been sheared off. When located, these portions of the plane showed no signs of explosion or fire. There was also convincing evidence that the main portion of the craft did not burn until it impacted on the ground.

Mary Doe, the surviving wife and sole heir of passenger John Doe, filed a complaint in the United States District Court located in the city of San Diego, naming American Airlines, the United States Government, and Pacific Fidelity Insurance Company as co-defendants.

Article IV of that complaint charged the U.S. Government with extreme negligence in prematurely deciding that the UFOs represented no threat to any aircraft, and for providing assurances to the defendant Airline Company of that belief. It read in part as follows:

"At said time and place defendants, through the acts of their employee then within the scope of his official duties, wilfully and intentionally demonstrated wanton disregard for the safety and welfare of the passengers and crew of said commercial airplane in failing to investigate the unknown objects before concluding that they were a mere misrepresentation of some conventional phenomenon . . . and, as a direct and proximate result of such assurances as aforesaid, any by reason of the resulting crash and fire, decedent suffered injuries which resulted in his death."

The circumstances of this hypothetical disaster and subsequent litigation are not as improbable or remote as they might at first appear. Unidentified flying objects have been sighted on a world-wide basis in increasing numbers over the past 22 years, and many of the best documented and most detailed accounts can be found in the official reports filed by experienced pilots who have encountered the strange phenomena. Military and airline pilots are among the most experienced observers of the sky. Their occupation requires them to spend hundreds of hours in the air, a fact which makes it necessary for them to possess a practical knowledge